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ABSTRACT

A study of Hmong refugees settling in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) focused on the social resources (e.g., kinship, literacy) available for adapting to life in the United States and the refugees' use of those resources. The study also resulted in profiles of several Hmong adults, documenting language and literacy use in daily life and patterns of interaction with kin and non-kin, within and across ethnic boundaries. The report begins with an introductory chapter on the history of Hmong kinship and literacy in Hmong culture, and then reviews the current situation in Philadelphia. The role of kinship and literacy in the lives of two men is described. The contrasts between these two men, their ways of using literacy and their ways of maintaining/making relationships are placed in the context of Philadelphia's wider community in a general discussion of literacy and the social process. A concluding chapter looks at the study's implications for social science and for educational policy and practice. A 20-item bibliography is included. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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LITERACY AND SOCIAL PROCESS:
A community in transition

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Literacy and Social Process: A Community in Transition

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1. INTRODUCTION

"AT THE MERCY OF AMERICA", shouts the cover page headline of The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine (10-21-84). "SHOCK AND CONFUSION WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE" reads a later news headline from the same paper (3-20-85). "THE PRIMITIVE PARADISE OF THE HMONG" heads a third (6-9-85). Hmong refugees from Laos are often portrayed in the American media as helpless peasants who have been thrust empty-handed into the brutal realities of civilization.

In fact, if Hmong refugees had not been resourceful they would not be here; they would be dead. In the ten years before arriving in the United States, these mountain farmers moved their families through dangerous jungle, seeking temporary refugee in secret camps, living on the run. The Hmong have been enormously resourceful in adjusting to drastic changes and dangerous conditions over extended periods of time.

The Hmong are a hilltribe who trace their origins to China. For about 150 years, the Hmong have been on the move, beginning with migration into Southeast Asian countries including Burma, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos (Geddes 1976). Explanations for the migrations range from pressure by hostile neighbors to searches for land for farming and livestock. Throughout the 19th century, Hmong migration caused little objection in host countries, because of their preference for establishing villages high in the mountains, a niche for which few others were interested in competing (Barney 1980).

Known for their strongly developed clan organization and fierce resistance to rule (Dunnigan 1982), many Hmong in Laos were hired by the United States government in the 1970's to fight under the leadership of General Vang Pao against the Pathet Lao Communist movement. When the Pathet Lao gained power in 1975,

those Hmong who had been hired by the Americans had to flee the country (Yang 1982). Those closest to Vang Pao were airlifted by helicopter, while the more fortunate of those remaining made their way across the Mekong River into Thailand.

After a period ranging from months to several years in Thai refugee camps, approximately 70,000 of these survivors were resettled in the United States (Office of Refugee Resettlement 1983). Media articles like those cited above are unaware of some resources such as kinship ties that Hmong bring to life in America, while they report primarily those areas that would seem to pose difficulty for living in the United States.

The same clan organization that strengthened their resources as fighters operates today as the Hmong struggle with adjustment to western urban life. While strong kinship structures play an important role in Hmong adaptation strategies, also significant is a resource that they do not traditionally possess: native language literacy. As subsistence farmers in Laos, the Hmong had little use for literacy or formal schooling. Although missionaries developed writing systems for the Hmong language in the late 1950s (Smalley 1976), only a minority of Hmong learned to use them. Inexperience with literacy poses various kinds of problems for the Hmong as they grapple with life in American cities, and it shapes the kinds of strategies that they employ as they solve the problems of daily living in their new environment.

While cross-cultural studies of literacy were often aimed at discovering cognitive consequences (i.e Olson 1977, Goody and Watt 1968, Ong 1982), increasing attention has been given to the variety of literacies and the social context in which reading and writing take on communicative meaning by historians (i.e. Davis 1972, Schofield 1968, Graff 1975), psychologists (i.e. Scribner and Cole 1981), and social scientists (i.e. Street 1984, Heath 1983). With a shift in focus, new questions become interesting. How does life in a literate environment affect or change social relationships? How do social relationships influence the way that

literacy is acquired and used? The Hmong from Laos who have come to the United States provide an exciting opportunity to look into the relationship of literacy and social process. Because literacy is a relatively recent innovation for the Hmong, it is possible to observe rapid changes as this mode of communication is introduced into their repertoire of communicative resources. The experience of the Hmong as they adapt to their new environment provides an opportunity for gaining insight into the interaction of communicative technology and social organization.

Hmong refugees began arriving in Philadelphia in 1979. Over the next six years, I was to have the opportunity to observe at close range the strategies and struggles of my new neighbors as they brought their enormous resources to bear in their transition from the mountaintops of Laos to the streets of Philadelphia. During this time, I surveyed each household in the city, to discover the kinds of social resources available for adapting to life in the United States. In addition, I developed several in-depth "portraits" of Hmong adults in the city to document language and literacy use in daily life, as well as patterns of interaction with kin and non-kin, both within and across ethnic boundaries.[1]

In this chapter, first, information is provided about kinship and literacy as they existed for the Hmong historically and as they operate in their new lives in urban Philadelphia. Next, the role of kinship and literacy in two men's lives is presented. The contrasts between these two men, their ways of using literacy and their ways of maintaining/making relationships are placed in context of Philadelphia's wider community in a general discussion of literacy and social process. My aim is to illustrate the point that the study of the functions and uses of literacy in specific people's lives can provide insights into human organization and social process. Finally, I will argue here that anthropologists have an important contribution to make for informing literacy instruction and educational practice as urban

society becomes increasingly culturally diverse.

2. OLD AND NEW RESOURCES

2.1 Traditional resources: kinship

In the Hmong community kinship relations are the primary features of a person's identity in the social order. The patrilineal clan system dominates Hmong social organization, as well as serving as a primary integrating factor in Hmong culture as a whole (Barney 1981). Altogether there are 20 clans known as xeem, each of which traces its origin to a common mythological ancestor. Hmong kinship has been characterized as "segmentary" because of ways that agnatic descent groups are divided and subdivided. First, the caj ces (lineage), literally "root branch", is a subdivision of the clan. If two members of a clan who speak the same dialect meet for the first time, they will compare genealogies to see if they yog ib caj ces "are of one lineage", that is, if they can trace their connection back to any common ancestor. Members of one lineage are likely to conduct rituals in the same fashion, and can depend on one another for more extensive help than clan mates from a distantly related lineage (Dunnigan 1982).

Second, pawg neeg "sub-lineage" is the primary unit whose members traditionally have lived in one village or a cluster of proximate villages. Ties to this lineage group are the most durable and dependable relationships that a Hmong individual has over his/her life (Reder 1985).

Finally, the smallest unit of social organization is the tsev neeg "family" or "house people". This has been referred to in the literature as "household", a misnomer which can cause confusion. This is because tsev neeg is a unit including all persons under the authority of a "householder", whether they live in the same house or not. This can include a man and his wife (or in Laos his wives), his unmarried daughters, his sons and their wives and children. So one tsev neeg often consists of three

generations. If a married son builds a new house near his father's house, it is not considered a new tsev neeg. It is only at the point when the son moves to another village that his home will be considered a separate household.

When a Hmong child is born, he or she automatically becomes a member of his/her father's clan. The child receives the father's clan name in addition to a given name, signalling membership. Strangers who share a clan name are considered to be siblings, and signal this relationship with the form of address kuv ti/kuv tyo literally meaning elder\younger sibling. A man can depend on his clan members for hospitality when travelling, or a woman may have to depend on clan ties to defend her rights in a marital dispute if she has no close relatives nearby. Clans are exogamous: members must marry outside of the clan.

When a young woman marries, she usually moves to the household of her husband (or her husband's father). Because of the exogamy taboo, she may marry into any clan except that bearing her own clan name. Marriage is not an individual matter, but rather is the formation of an alliance between clans. Traditionally, marriages were arranged by household heads for their children with bride price an integral part of marriage negotiations. Neej tsa (in-laws) then become members of a network of marriage alliances (affinal ties) which strengthen their kin resources as networks are broadened.

2.1.1 Hmong families in Philadelphia

Hmong people in Laos do not have a "first" or "last" name. As mentioned above, they automatically receive the clan name of their father, signalling their membership in that clan, as well as a name given to them by their family. The order of these names is not significant. For legal purposes in the United States, most Hmong have adopted their clan name as their "last name" and use their given name as their first name (except for leaders, who seem to distinguish themselves by using their clan names first).

It is impossible to talk about Hmong families in Philadelphia without referring to the clans to which they belong. Among the twenty Hmong clans that exist, eleven are represented in Philadelphia by male household heads. These include Chang, Hang, Kue, Lee, Lo(r), Moua, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong and Yang. Attempts to take a census of Hmong families in Philadelphia confronts the researcher with the contradictions in Hmong and American ways of reckoning family units. As described above, the term "household", for the Hmong, need not refer only to those who live in one house, but rather includes any persons under the authority of the householder.

The American social welfare system, in contrast, is organized around the notion of nuclear families. A list compiled by the Hmong Association, in its role as liaison to the American bureaucracy, lists "families" which are headed by any married man or by women who are divorced or widowed. This is to facilitate the distribution of welfare and social security benefits. In 1985, the list included, for example, nine Kue families. Any Kue who was asked for the number of Kue families in Philadelphia, however, would have replied three. In fact, these nine "families" were under the authority of three household heads.

The Hmong list officially divides the Hmong in Philadelphia as living in "Weston" and "Norton" (not the real neighborhood names). In a survey of September 1985, I found that Philadelphia's Hmong community consisted of 58 nuclear families comprising approximately 28 households. Families tend to live in clusters, sometimes with entire households occupying the same building. Especially noteworthy is the division of clans by geographical area. Families belonging to the largest clans in Philadelphia, Lo and Kue, all lived in Norton, as did members of the Hang clan. The Xiongs and five of six Moua families all lived in Weston. The few exceptions to the rule of virilocal residence include widows or divorcees who seem to be less predictable in their residence choices[2], as well as two men who are the sole

representatives of their own clans in Philadelphia. Without any kin of their own, they live near the kin of their wives.

Clearly, geographical cohesiveness is the general rule for clans in Philadelphia. The division between Norton and Weston, reflected by residence patterns, is characterized by other features which will be discussed in Section 3 below.

2.1.2 Counting on kin in America

Life in Laos was characterized by the comfort of knowing that the mountains were webbed with a haven of kin, known and unknown. If a man made a long journey, he could be sure that in any village, as long as he found a clansman, he would be housed and fed along the way. Likewise, this web of kin connections still operates for some Hmong in urban America. Chou Hang describes his experience attending a conference in San Francisco. Upon arriving at the airport, he simply opened the phone book to the "H"s, calling the first Hang listed. He was then picked up, housed and fed for the duration of the conference by a family he had never before met.

Resettlement efforts that recognize the continuing operation of traditional kinship structures such as the lineage, sub-lineage and household have a better chance of success. Doctors, for example, who need permission for certain medical procedures are more likely to get cooperation (i.e. the necessary signatures) if members of the appropriate sub-group are included as information is given and decisions are made. (Dunnigan 1982a) Health clinics in Minneapolis among other cities have found substantial improvements in patient cooperation when treatment took into account the operation of kinship networks and the ways in which these affect decision-making and action (Dunnigan 1982b).

While categories of kinship may have remained the same, ways of reckoning the members of those categories have gained enormous flexibility in the face of the drastic changes entailed by

resettlement. While pawg neeg translates technically as "sub-lineage", for some it has come to mean "helping group" in a much broader sense. War orphan Ying Lo now counts among members of his pawg neeg members of the Hmong student club at the local community college (who study together and plan special events), as well as other orphan bachelors who collectively lend money to one another for the bride price in turn as they get married. Even the tsev neeg, or "family" (literally house people) has become fluid enough to begin healing gaps left by the terrible losses of war. While Ying reports living with his "blood brother", neither of the men can identify the point of connection on their respective geneological charts.

These flexible ways of reckoning kin have made it possible for some Hmong people in Philadelphia to continue relying on traditional kinds of relationships for support while adapting to the realities of the social decimation caused by death and diaspora in the wake of a decade of war and flight.

2.2 New Resources: Literacy and Schooling

2.2.1 History of Hmong schooling

While the Hmong have a history of well-developed clan organization, they have a very short history of experience with formal schooling. Because of their isolation in Laos, virtually no Hmong in the mountains had any formal education before World War II. The first village school in the high mountain region was set up in 1939 (Barney 1967). Even after the number of village schools grew, children had to go to larger towns if they were to study beyond the third year. Although schools became more accessible after WWII, there was a high dropout rate as Hmong children became older, had to travel further to secondary schools in larger towns and take on more responsibility for family farm activities. In addition, classes were taught exclusively in Lao, creating yet more of an obstacle to success for Hmong children (Yang 1975).

2.2.2 Formal schooling in Laos of Philadelphia's Hmong

The Hmong in Philadelphia have brought with them educational resources consistent with this history. I found that of the 167 adults in Philadelphia, only 16% report having more than 3 years of schooling in Laos. It is interesting to note the distribution of education by clan. Among the nine clans in Philadelphia with members who have more than six years of education in Laos, all of the larger Philadelphia clans are represented (2 Hangs, 3 Kues, 2 Los, 2 Mouas, 1 Vang, 1 Xiong, 1 Yang). This suggests that schooling was not the domain of any particular clan. Rather, it was a rare commodity for which lineage groups had to pool their resources to invest in the eldest or brightest boy. The low percentage of women in the figures is consistent with this explanation.

2.2.3 History of Hmong Literacy

Traditional Hmong society might be characterized as "non-literate". Smalley (1976) describes such a culture as one in which

> ... a child can be born and grow up, an adult can live and die, without a strong need to read and write. He can live a normal existence within his own community without a feeling that he is in any way culturally deprived by lack of ability to communicate through marks made on paper. Life as he knows it does not include reading and writing as a major component (p2).

Indeed, until the early 1950s, the Hmong of Laos did not have a system for writing their spoken language. Smalley (quoted above) is one of the missionaries who developed the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) at that time, for purposes of religious teaching. The RPA was easy to learn; Hmong in Philadelphia report learning it informally from friends or relatives, or by studying a primer on their own. They report mastering the system in time periods

ranging from one afternoon to four weeks.

Within ten years, use of the RPA began to spread for purposes such as newsletters and the recording of history and oral literature (Reder 1985). In the late 1960's, missionaries created another Hmong writing system based on the Lao script to accommodate the Lao government, with their concern for unity in Laos and control over ethnic minorities. For those who became literate, the choice of script was a political one.

2.2.4 Literacy Today: Philadelphia's Hmong

In Philadelphia, the number of Hmong who report being literate in Lao corresponds exactly with those who report having received formal schooling in Laos. Thus, Lao literacy and formal schooling are inextricably bound. In contrast, many who never had experience with formal schooling have at least some literacy skills in Hmong. Most learned informally <u>after</u> their flight from Laos, either in Thai refugee camps, or here in the United States. Self-reports of household heads for themselves and their families indicate that 60% of those between 20 and 45 years old are now able to read and write Hmong, despite the very low rate of formal schooling in Laos. Because literacy has become a resource that is spread by non-institutional means that does not require setting aside lineage resources, women have caught up to men in their acquisition. The mode of transmission has changed the possibilities for acquisition and for use.

How do old and new resources affect one another? Does coming to a literate environment change who depends on whom? Do kinship relationships have any affect on who learns to read and write and for what purposes? Both educators and social scientists can profit from understanding the interaction of these two social resources. In the next section, this interaction is examined in the lives of two men and in their communities.

3. LITERACY AND CHANGING LIVES

In order to see at close range the ways that kinship connections and literacy figure in real people's everyday lives, it is useful to focus on individuals and their families. What kinds of problems do people have to solve? How do they go about solving them? More specifically, how do people use literacy and solve literacy-related problems? How are kinship ties used in context of radically changed circumstances? What other kinds of social resources are being developed in adapting to a new setting?

This section examines the lives of two men who have selected very different strategies for adapting to life in the United States, including the functions and uses of literacy in each man's life, as well as in terms of kinship relationships. Chou Chang[3] was a young man of 25 who successfully completed his high school equivilency diploma during the time of the research. The son of a town merchant, he had the opportunity to become literate in Lao during four years of schooling before becoming a soldier at the age of twelve. I watched with awe as Chou and his wife grappled with an impossible bureaucracy that had immediate power over their survival and sustenance. I suggest below that for Chou Chang, literacy can be seen as an addition as well as an agent of change in the communicative economy, with profound effects on his relationships with others.

Pao Joua Lo, on the other hand, was a failing student in my community college classroom. He never spoke, never completed an assignment, and never passed an exam. I had no idea at the time that this mysterious older gentleman had experience with education and literacy that most of his Hmong contemporaries did not have. He learned Lao literacy in military camp and taught himself to read and write in Hmong. It wasn't until several years after he flunked out of school that I would learn about his power in the community and his considerable resources for solving problems.

As I learned more about Pao Joua Lo, the things I knew about Chou Chang became more interesting. The contrasts were striking in the two men's ways of using literacy, their other kinds of resources, their desires and their ways of making meaning in their new lives in the United States. The contrast between these two men illuminates revealing contrasts in Philadelphia's wider Hmong community.

3.1 Literacy and Changing Relationships: Chou Chang's Story[4]

I first met Chou in a Lutheran church service. In his role as assistant, he sat patiently beside the pastor until it was time to give a Bible reading in Hmong to the mixed Hmong and American congregation. After the service, I was introduced to Chou as an English teacher who was interested in the neighborhood refugees.[5] Characteristic of his interest in Americans, Chou invited me to his home without hesitation.

When I arrived at the fire-gutted row in Weston, I was welcomed into the the end house, the only one intact. The second-floor apartment was clean and uncluttered with two babies sleeping in a heap of blankets, and a table full of Thai herbs growing in plastic pots by the window. Chou invited me to stay for dinner. Having heard that Americans prefer bread to rice, Chou's wife Sai placed half a loaf of Wonderbread on my dinner bowl. They were anxious to please, in contrast to what I would later experience in Pao Youa Lo's house, where my presence was tolerated with unhostile indifference.

In order to learn the Hmong language and to observe the functions and uses of literacy for one family, I arranged to move in with Chou and Sai for four weeks in the winter of 1982. During these weeks I came to see Chou Chang as a literacy and culture broker who used his language skills for surviving urban bureaucracy, as well as for creating new roles and relationships for himself in his new setting. The data presented here is drawn primarily from that homestay.

3.1.1 Literacy as a tool for Negotiating with New Institutions

Adult literacy teachers are often sensitized to the extent to which managing life in urban America entails dealing with literacy. Students often bring in their baffling documents, important-looking letters, insurmountable forms and questions about what they see around them. Life in the Chang household provided a sampling of some of the problems to be solved that required literacy skills.

One Tuesday afternoon, Chou received a letter from his caseworker instructing him to report to her office Friday morning, or his "case" would be "closed". He was to bring four documents with him, including one which had to be stamped by an agency several miles away (and not easily accessible by public transportation), and others which required picking up various forms with signatures from different places. That evening, Chou spent his homework time fixing his bicycle, knowing that it would be impossible to complete the tasks on foot in one day. He called his English teacher to tell her he would be absent.

On Friday, Chou reported to his caseworker with all of the forms that he had gathered. Both his signature and Sai's were required, and both had to be made in the presence of the caseworker. So when Chou got home at about midday, he took over the child care so that Sai could repeat the journey. She did not yet know how to use the subway, how to distinguish the North from the Southbound platform, nor how to read the sign for the Springgarden stop. Unsure if I would be able to accompany her, Chou memorized the location of the correct platform and counted the stops to report to Sai for her journey.

Chou felt lucky to have his then-current caseworker because "she help us everything", in contrast to a previous caseworker: "Window broken, he don't care. No heat, he not do anything. New baby born, he don't help extra money." Some neighbors did not find the new one as "lucky". An older Hmong woman living one floor below who did not know how to decipher forms, letters or

bills found the preparation of the required documents to be an insurmountable task. In exchange for Chou's help on procuring gas money through the caseworker, the woman allowed Chou to use her oven to save on his own gas bills.

When the old woman was unable to solve a literacy-related problem, she sometimes brought it to Chou. When Chou was stymied by bills or difficult homework, for example, he turned to me or to another American in his church. Sometimes favors were returned in kind, as illustrated above with the story of the gas money. Other requests for help caused conflict.

Chou had been complaining for a couple of days about a man who wanted him to write a fraudulent letter to welfare. The man, who lived six blocks away, had asked Chou to claim that he lived with him so that he could pick up a welfare check at Chou's address. Chou complained: "He want me to cheat for him ... he not my relative, he never help me anything. He just make trouble for me". Chou felt that the request was inappropriate, and that it jeopardized his own standing with welfare. The visitor was neither a neighbor nor a clan member. He called upon Chou for this favor because Chou was among the few literate household heads who would be able to perform the task.

Chou later received a call from a Hmong leader. As in many other cities, social service agencies hired the earlier Hmong arrivals who became bilingual to work in the resettlement process. These people have become the prime mediators between American caseworkers and the Hmong population in the area. Not coincidentally, Chou reports, the members of some clans seem to fare best in matters that require attention from the social service system. For example, Chou said that when he first arrived, the leader called the police when Sai was in labor, rather than taking the time to accompany the couple to the hospital as he did for some families. Because Chou spoke very little English at the time, he felt helpless when the doctors decided to perform a Caesarean section on Sai. He is sure that it

could have been avoided with the right advocacy. In Laos, this leader would appropriately be expected to aid members of his own clan. As a caseworker in Philadelphia, however, he is seen by Americans as a representative of "the Hmong" and is asked to be an advocate for members of many clans. The old and new expectations do not always harmonize.

The leader, then, called Chou asking him to write the letter to welfare while several Americans persuaded him not to do it. As the phone continued to ring, and Chou's homework lay neglected, he shouted in exasperation, "Too many calls! Too many questions!" With that, he pulled the phone wires out of the wall and sat down to do his homework, complaining, "Everybody want something from me!"

In these examples, decoding and composing documents play an important role in economic survival. For Chou Chang, ability to decode bureaucratic messages in a timely way meant the difference between keeping and losing government support. Relatives and neighbors also turned to Chou (with or without success) to help them negotiate the maze of literacy-based channels to gain access to resources. Those who have literacy skills must use them to gain and maintain benefits, and those who don't must often rely on those who do. The homestay with Chou Chang made evident that who may rely on whom has become problematic. Whereas dependence relationships once resided wholly with families and clans, new categories such as caseworker/client, co-tenant or urban neighbor pose new possibilities and pressures for different kinds of interaction in this new setting.

3.1.2 Literacy as a Tool for Mediating between Culture Groups

Members of Chou's church grappled with how to effectively accommodate the large new population of refugees. Incorporating the Hmong into religious life was a priority. On any given Sunday, one or more Hmong couples were baptized, becoming full members of the "church family", a term used by one of the Sunday

school teachers. Chou used to spend several hours each Saturday studying the Bible with the pastor. Thus prepared, he led Sunday school Bible lessons in Hmong for new arrivals and others who could not understand English. When Chou did his short Bible reading in Hmong for the whole congregation, on the other hand, he introduces some Hmong culture to Americans. His seat next to the pastor during the service and his name printed in the service program legitimized both the task and Chou himself as mediator in the exchange.

Chou's role as mediator extended past the boundaries of the church. During the homestay, a social worker from a neighboring church who had heard of Chou's writing skills called, asking him to translate a sign from English to Hmong for a clothing room . That evening he put aside his homework to write and rewrite the message until he was satisfied that it was well done, and invited the woman to call on his help any time. Thus, Chou also conveyed information to Hmong people outside of his church, and in so doing, became a mediator for the wider neighborhood. Chou spends time deliberately cultivating relationships with Americans. Before I moved in with his family, Chou would often call me on the phone to chat. One afternoon during my four-week stay, when I returned to his apartment, Chou was going systematically through his memo-pad phone directory calling each American on his list, one by one. The content of each conversation was more or less the same, as he asked each person what was "up" and told his own news. It seemed clear that Chou made efforts to connect with American friends, teachers, and church members. The decision he and Sai made to let me live with them for a month was another daring move to allow an American into their world.

For Chou Chang, literacy skills are resources that enabled him to take the role of culture broker. Hmong compatriots like those in his church relied on Chou to bring them information and access to participate in American institutions. The pastor and

the social worker cited above are among many Americans who called on Chou to effectively reach members of the Hmong community. While Chou actively sought to incorporate Americans into his network, he cultivated his role in linking these two cultural worlds. What are the rewards for this role? Why did Chou Chang devote so much energy to this difficult task? These questions are explored below.

3.1.3 Literacy and New Social Status in a Changing Social Order

Returning to Chou and Sai's apartment in the afternoons, I would often find Sai sewing decorative squares with tiny precise stitches and stunning colors while she rocked her youngest child on her back in a brightly embroidered baby carrier. Sai often worked with her sister and mother, as well as several neighbors. All chattered or sat quietly as I joined them with my clumsy crochet hook and yarn. At just such a gathering, I thought of inviting friends and neighbors to a party at which the women could display their pieces for sale. The event was planned, resulting in $700 of collective sales. The money was distributed to the individual artists whose pieces were sold.

I suggested to Chou and Sai that each woman contribute one or two dollars for a kitty to cover refreshments for the party, and to start some collective savings for renting craft tables or even eventually saving for a storefront. Chou spoke out: "Hmong people can pay for food at the party, [to reimburse an American helper] but not to save money together. My name Chang, I help Chang. We don't trust money together."

There were the divisions: family helps within family, clan helps within clan. Cooperation was only possible to repay the American authority. An interesting conflict then arose. By miscommunication between myself and another American who was keeping books, money was not collected for reimbursing me for the refreshments as we had agreed originally. I brought it to Chou's attention. "Don't worry", he comforted me. He would collect the

money from those seamstresses who were also members of Sunday school. Because of Chou Chang's language and literacy skills, in this setting he had a new kind of authority. He could not collect from the other sale participants. "They not obey me", he said. "But people in my church, I think we can help you." A new unit of cooperation was being formed - members of a congregation who could be influenced to act by a young man who may or may not share their name.

Chou once commented to me, "I don't have family here- I have my church. People help me, give me a desk, dresser, chair..." Indeed, the church has been a source of furniture and clothing for Chou and Sai. During my short stay at their home, individual congregation members lent a space heater when the heat was broken and moved to investigate the delay in bringing Chou's brother over from Thailand, among other things. They provided those things for which, in the past, Chou could only turn to "family" or clan.

In sum, for Chou and Sai, literacy was a critical tool for navigating through educational and social service bureaucracies. It was a tool which enabled them to mediate between culture groups. As this new mode of communication has entered the social fabric, for people like Chou Chang, the use of literacy has accompanied important changes in their relationships with others. Without strong kinship connections, cultivating new relationships and becoming a literacy broker provided a strategy for managing life in a difficult new setting.

3.2 Pao Joua Lo: Community Newskeeper

Here I bring the reader's attention to a man with entirely different circumstances and strategies for getting along in urban Philadelphia. Two years after the homestay in the Chang household, when I expressed interest in getting to know another Hmong family, my Hmong teacher offered to introduce me to his (clan) brother, a man of 51. Having heard that this man had

declined the nomination for President of the Hmong Association because of his poor English skills, I prepared to offer English lessons in order to have a chance to observe life in another household. The man was none other than Pao Youa Lo, the hopeless student from my community college classroom several years earlier. Oddly, I felt embarrassed as if I had been the one who failed! He showed no such discomfort. Pao Youa was not interested in the tutoring sessions I offered. His wife and daughters however, were delighted by the prospect, and agreed to have me come to see them twice a week.

Entering Pao Youa's Norton row house I was immediately struck by the portraits framed and hung on each wall of the front room. On the first wall is an austere photograph of a balding man staring resolutely ahead, with a heavy silver necklace prominent on his chest indicating he was a man of means. Pao Youa explains that this is his uncle, a brave and respected fighter who died in Laos. On the same wall is a photo of Pao Youa himself in combat fatigues, standing with the General Vang Pao, under whose leadership the Hmong fought and fled to America. On an opposite wall hangs a family photograph of all the Lo men, with occasional children filling fathers' laps. Each photograph has a slip of paper taped at the bottom with an explanation typed in Hmong, as well as the date of the photograph. While the enjoyment of family photographs is typical among the Hmong, the carefully typed embellishments are not. Centered over the false fireplace was a certificate with Lao writing, declaring Pao Youa's courage and his contribution as a soldier to the war.

What was going on here? How could it be that my most pathetic and helpless student was pictured beside the Hmong community's greatest leader? Who was this man and how did he manage? Over the next year, I was to learn about resources that are simply not visible to a Community College English teacher.

3.2.1 Kin connections, leadership roles

On any given day, when Pao Youa is home, he usually sits by the large window, where he has arranged a u-shaped cluster of tables stacked with pads and notebooks, his chair nestled inside. There is rarely a morning or afternoon that goes by without a visit- usually from a clan brother. On one typical afternoon Pao Youa chatted with several of these brothers, carefully pouring arrow root he had bought in Chinatown into a bottle of Dubonnet, altering proportions by pouring contents back and forth between two bottles. The men took small tastes, until they were all satisfied that the medicine was correctly mixed to help "weak men" regain their strength. The chatter during the project was typical of these frequent visits in which the men talked, among other things, of fishing, of prospects for income during the new blueberry-picking season, of their own travels, or of the impressions their sons had gotten of life in other states.

It is at gatherings like these that the need for help was voiced, and cooperative strategies are agreed upon. Cheng Mao Lo had just moved into his new home. The purchase was made possible by pooling of money for the down payment. When the mortgage payments were under control, Cheng Mao would return the funds to be made available for the next cooperative approach to individual problems.

Gatherings of kin are not always small or informal. Pao Youa's house is arranged, like many other Hmong people's rowhouses, with furniture easy to push aside. Pao Youa hosted several parties over the period of my regular visits. He was often invited to parties of others as well. I rarely attended a party in Norton in which Pao Youa was not present. Part of Pao Youa's position in Philadelphia is created and supported by the alliances his family has made with other Philadelphia families. Pao Youa's eldest daughter married the son of Hmong Association President Hang Chou in 1984. The wedding was an event that created a bond between two of Philadelphia's more powerful

families. Such a bond strengthens and perpetuates existing alliances.

Pao Youa's popularity is not limited to Philadelphia, however. During the New Year season, Pao Youa traveled to Boston and Rhode Island among other cities to attend New Year Festivities, indicating that his support network is wide and strong. Pao Youa's eldest daughter married a clan "nephew" of the number one Hmong leader in the United States, General Vang Pao. This continues the alliance formed when Pao Youa himself married Lee Vang.

The invitation to run for the presidency of the Hmong Association in 1983 was a clear signal of Pao Youa's high regard in Philadelphia's Hmong community. His absence on the official slate, evidently, did not interfere with his leadership role. Nine household heads reported going to him for help with family and other problems. People go to Pao Youa "because he know how to find the middle way" when there is conflict, reported one man. Pao Youa's son Fue says that it is good not to have the wisest leaders at the top (referring to his father) "Our Hmong president need to be spokesman, like secretary of state Schultz. Then if we have problem with him, we can go higher, to the wisest man. If top man, he is president, then there is no where to go if there is a problem."

Indeed, the list of those who go to Pao Youa for advice or help is impressive. Three of his clan brothers reported coming to him, including the community's paid job counselor. Those from other clans who reported turning to Pao Youa all play leadership roles in Philadelphia, such as two mej koob (marriage go-betweens) and the deacon to the community's beloved Father Avery. Finally, elected president Chou Hang himself, as well as his aged father, both reported turning to Pao Youa when they want advice about important decisions or when there is a conflict within the household.

Pao Youa's role as leader raises a host of interesting questions about the nature of leadership. While his younger affinal kinsman was elected as spokesperson of the Hmong community, elders are, in some cases, maintaining traditional roles of authority. While certain kinds of problems, such as negotiating with English-speaking institutions, require new solutions, other age-old conflicts such as marital discord persist, requiring the intervention of traditional experts with traditional solutions. Old and new forms of authority coexist as different sorts of problems require the wisdom of different kinds of experts.

3.2.2 Literacy activities

Pao Youa does not have a job. Because of a leg wound suffered in the seventies he cannot be long on his feet. Nevertheless, he was rarely idle. In his window niche, I often found him reading, browsing, jotting notes or cutting and pasting. Behind him stood a tall cabinet filled with books and albums that he himself created.

The first thing an observer notes when Pao You has a book or magazine in his hand, is that he leafs through with an obvious goal. It becomes clear that he is drawn to photographs of powerful leaders. If a picture of Reagan or Thatcher appears on the page, for example, he studies the picture. If the caption is brief, he follows it with his finger, trying to read each word. "Reagan very good man", he smiles. "Very strong against Communism". Pao Youa showed me a scrap book made from a 1979 desk diary. Each page was covered with pictures of world leaders and accompanying text, or by pictures alone. His fascination with powerful leaders is in keeping with his own stature as a soldier and a military strategist.

Pao Youa has also used his literacy skills in the creation of elaborate personal chronicles. In a typical document, the reader opens the first page to find a photograph of Pao Youa in

combat fatigues with several other men. At the top of the page is a neatly typed slip of paper that reads (in Hmong): "The first person here is Pao Youa Lo. The second person is....." The next page translates: "This is Mrs. Pao Youa's book 9/28/85". The reader meanders through images of family members and friends, some posing solemnly in traditional Hmong clothing, some gathered in ragged groups at the Thai refugee camps, and others smiling from behind their sunglasses near their American inner city apartments.

Other chronicals include Pao Youa's life story, with a detailed account of his days as a soldier in Laos, particularly during the war. Britannica Books of the Year for 1971, 1972 and 1974 are highlighted in yellow marker in the sections that provide the historical context for the story. One steno pad is filled with Pao Youa's version, in careful Lao lists, of the history of French and U.S. intervention in Laos. Fue explains that his father is the history "expert", and that people come to him with any questions they have about history.

With albums, scrapbooks, reference materials and personal journals, Pao Youa has created a rich and varied chronicle. He is satisfied to think that his efforts will help his children to understand the country from which they came, and the events leading to their flight and relocation in their new home. They will surely also come to gain some understanding of their father's role in the historic saga.

Pao Youa's interests are not confined to the distant past, nor are his efforts solely a family affair. His interest in current news events has become integral to his role in the community as an expert on world events, both past and present. During a party in Pao Youa's home, as is the custom, the children and women scattered after the meal, and the adult men gathered around the freshly cleaned table for beer and talk. Pao Youa passed three letters written in Lao around the table, where the literate men read them aloud to their kin who were unable to

read. From a California-based organization, these letters discussed plans for guerrilla warfare against the government of Laos. Fue explained an article about the MIAs and military activity in Laos from that morning's American newspaper to the whole group.

Each day, Pao Youa monitors the media for news of the United States, of the world powers, of individual heroes and of leaders. His findings are often the topic of discussion when kin come to call. Pao Youa is also the focal point for information about Laos. Members of the community depend on him for information, and at times, for analysis. A great deal of Pao Youa's time and creative energy is given to activities that support his role as newskeeper and newssharer.

3.2.4 New Technologies, Old Ties

One of the ironies of dislocation is that new technologies made possible the maintenance of old ties in novel ways. This is illustrated by some of Pao Youa's activities. Pao Youa keeps a notebook in which he is carefully compiling (in Lao) a list of every Lo family in Philadelphia with members' names, sexes, birth dates and relations to the householder. He is collecting these, he explains, to contribute to the effort of identifying the Lo families worldwide. The information will be forwarded to an elder Lo, at "Lo headquarters", in Omaha, Nebraska. The site has been chosen deliberately because of its centrality to Los on both coasts and between in the United States.

The clan operates as a corporate group beyond geographic boundaries. Pao Youa attended a Lo clan meeting in Wisconsin this spring where talks went all day and night non-stop for three days. Among the topics covered were the spelling of the clan name (there are now three variations that were created during time of immigration) and whether or not steps should be taken to make the spellings uniform, thus reflecting clan solidarity; the laws of the United States and how to carry on with Hmong tradition

without breaking U.S. laws"; and finally, how to encourage children to succeed in their education. As one result of this meeting, Pao Youa made plans with local clan members to hold a party where they could reward each Lo child with 50c for each "A" earned on the report card during the school year. What is interesting here is that education of the children and good citizenship are still seen as issues that are the domain of the clan as a whole, rather than the domain of a local geographic community.

It is ironic that literacy has provided Pao Youa and his family with a tool for studying Hmong oral tradition. Over the last couple of years, I have heard complaints from elders that the young people don't know the love songs anymore. They don't know the appropriate courtship, marriage and funeral songs. In 1985, under new leadership, the Hmong Association created "Culture Classes". Every Saturday, for three hours, four mej koob (marriage go-betweens) were paid out of a grant raised by the Association to teach the old customs and appropriate songs to younger men. The old men complain that they are getting too old to travel so often and to drink so much (as is required in the negotiation of marriages), and they are relieved that younger men are learning how to take over their role.

The students, including Pao Youa, are predominantly Los. The younger students take turns spending Friday nights with the teacher for that particular week, helping to prepare notes and written aids. They then assist in the actual class as well. Fue says that he sometimes takes notes in Hmong when the exact words are required, but that for general information it is faster to write Lao. With the help of young mediators, then, the old men are teaching oral traditions in a classroom format, which has become the most efficient and comfortable setting in which the young men have become accustomed to learning. It will not be surprising, if, in a few years, a traditional marriage is desired, one of the Lo men will be called to negotiate the terms

and aid in preparation for the wedding. In their newly learned traditional roles, these young men will use literacy tools, for better or worse, that were not available to their mentors.

In sum, Pao Youa is a professional soldier who has created for himself the roles of history- and newskeeper. Members of the community see him as an expert, and depend on him for information about the past and about the current state of affairs in the world. In these pages literacy is presented as a way of celebrating powerful people, and a means through which to tell the story of what is happening. In addition, for Pao Youa, literacy provides a way of keeping himself and his community informed and connected with one another, with their traditions, and with their past and present.

3.3 Two men in context

The differences between Chou Chang and Pao Youa Lo are characteristic of two sub-communities with distinct features. The constrasts explored below highlight the relationship of literacy skills and problem-solving needs on one hand, with kinship as opposed to other social relationships on the other.

3.3.1 Norton and Weston: Two Separate Communities

In the summer of 1984 I drove out to Wisconsin to see Chou and Sai. Before the journey, Pao Youa Lo held a large supper. To protect me on my journey, several of the men tied strings around my wrist saying prayers for my safety. The strings were to keep the evil spirits from luring my soul away from my body. When I arrived in Wisconsin, after the children climbed down and the excitement of the greetings calmed, Chou and Sai noticed the strings. They were noticeably displeased. "Where did you get these?" Chou asked. I told them, guessing that they might be jealous that I was becoming involved with other Hmong families in their absence. It was not until a year later that I would learn what was really bothering them.

In the spring of 1985 it began to seem that money would become available from a local foundation for indigenous refugee education projects. I spoke with Pao Youa and his sons about ways to use the money. They spoke of their interest in creating culture classes. Specifically, they wanted to learn:

txiv xaiv - funeral songs; songs of death

fiv sou - message to mother of bride from hopeful suitor

kav xwm - correct way to bring messages between clans

tus mej koob - how to be a middleman and correctly negotiate weddings on behalf of particular family or clan

When I asked about where these classes could be held in order to accommodate both Weston and Norton Hmong, they laughed. Weston Hmong aren't interested in old customs, they said. No need to worry about accommodating them. Bao Xiong[7], an articulate Hmong woman, elaborated:

> Hmong people we have Weston way and Norton way. Not the same. Some things the same, like language, like some custom. But Norton Hmong people they still have ua neng [shaman], play qeej [talking reeds], want to learn old song, keep old custom. Weston culture not the same. Weston Hmong very want to be Christian, not dance or sing. They think that bad. They want to forget old way, maybe they afraid the hell. They think the new way, that's better. Fieldnotes 1/5/86

Chou and Sai are indeed devout Christians who had lived in Weston. The day they welcomed me into their new Wisconsin home, they were recoiling at my indulgence in "superstition", then evident on my wrist. Some of the differences between "Norton way" and "Weston way" were to become more evident, with certain features characterizing each group.

In this section, Chou and Pao Joua are portrayed in the context of their own communities. Their ways of getting along demonstrate that types of kin networks and new non-kin relationships go hand in hand with the ways people solve problems, the immediate need for literacy skills, and the kinds

of uses to which literacy, as a tool, is put.

Indeed, Pao Youa fits Bao Xiong's characterization of Norton. He owns a geeg, which he is teaching Fue to play. He can often been found repairing and maintaining it to be passed on. His clan brother and neighbor is a shaman. Many families in Norton bring their children to him when they are sick. Members of the Lo family are interested in the old songs, the formulas for traditional negotiation of marriages. They spend long hours both learning in a class arranged by the Hmong Association and studying at home.

Chou's decisions are in keeping with the characteristics Bao paints for residents of Weston. He relies exclusively (albeit with reluctance and suspicion) on the American medical establishment. Chou and Sai do not like to talk about shamanism - they seem to be embarrassed by the idea. Unlike young people in Norton, Chou and Sai have no tapes of Hmong music- either the young people's rock and roll nor more traditional ballads and love songs. The only songs they sing or listen to are from hymnals that have been developed by missionaries.

3.3.2 Solving problems

The differences between Chou and Pao Joua demonstrate that to understand the process of adaptation of "the Hmong", it is necessary to recognize changes in relationships and differences between individuals in their ways of coping. A focus on the networks of each provides a way to look at individuals as actors making choices as they selectively develop or draw on the social resources available to them.

It became evident that Chou and Sai were willing to incorporate me into their lives to the degree that I dared ask. They took me in, housed and fed me, and allowed their children to grow to love me. They told me their troubles and asked my help often. Sai and I developed a relationship in which we could talk about our worries, our marriages, our lives. She now calls me

elder sister. Their intimacy with me, however, is not out of character. It reflects an openness to allow Americans into the fabric of their lives. During my homestay, there were many occasions in which Americans were invited into the house. Church members came by to bring furniture and warm clothes. Neighborhood workers seeking help in establishing contact with the community were welcomed. Even Jehovah's witnesses who came to the door were invited in and were given courteous audience, despite Chou and Sai's lack of interest in their message. My own invitation to the first visit was characteristic of Chou and Sai's interest in welcoming Americans into their home, and in cultivating American friends.

As Chou and Sai try to integrate Americans into their lives, confusion sometimes ensues. In 1986 Chou and Sai anticipated a visit from me by planning a party for their baby son to coincide as a welcome party for me. About half of the guests were Americans. They included church members, two neighbors, past and present English teachers and the landlord. When Chou gathered everyone for a long Hmong prayer, the Americans didn't know whether they were expected to go into the room where the prayers were being said or not, and Chou didn't know whether or not to invite them. They were also confused by the rules for eating, since they were invited to eat first, to be followed by the Hmong men and then the Hmong women. Some were obviously distressed that the seating did not permit the hosts and hostesses to eat at the same time. Chou tried to assure them not to worry, that they would eat afterwards, but he was obviously uneasy as he sensed his guests' distress.

In contrast, such confusion rarely exists at Pao Youa's house. Notes from six months of intensive fieldwork contain no record of any American (besides myself) ever being present in the house. The English lessons I offered the women were gladly accepted - and food was generously shared. However, the Los never asked my help in solving a problem. During the fieldwork period,

I was never asked to leave, but I was never asked to come! If I overheard news of a party, or if I learned of the telltale trip for a pig, I was welcome to be there. Efforts were rarely made, however, to inform or invite me. I have no record of ever seeing another American at a Lo party.

Pao Youa rarely expresses concern about getting along. He is surrounded by kin who can help him deal with most bureaucratic problems. At most parties he attends, he is likely to drink with Chai Mao Lo, a clan brother and job placement worker as well as with Hmong Association President Hang Chou, the father of his daughter's husband. At the Hmong Association Office, Hang and other Association workers act as intermediaries for welfare distribution. Pao Youa typically fishes with his clan brothers Chai Koua and Chou Lao Lo, whose children attend college, and have become experienced in dealing with American institutions.

Chou Chang, on the other hand, while he lived in Philadelphia, complained that he was without relatives. The economic survival of the Chang family depended on the whim of American caseworkers, to whom Chai reported directly. He enlisted the aid of teachers, the pastor, the social worker, and any contact provided by the new institutions that had come to play a role in his life. While there was some overlap, particularly in the church community, the people in the other institutions had no contact at all with one another. Their roles in Chou Chang's life were singular and institutional.

The differences between the Lo and Chang households are characteristic of their neighbors. It is entirely typical for families in Weston to seek the help and friendship of Americans, while those in Norton tend to solve problems, socialize and interact rather exclusively within Hmong networks. As a natural consequence, the degree to which problem-solving is done through informal versus institutional means is different for the two groups.

When asked about the greatest problems of the Hmong in Philadelphia, residents of Norton and Weston did not differ in their answers. Language barriers and educational problems were most commonly reported. Low English language skills were blamed for isolation of the elderly, as well as for limited job options and thus low pay and bad job security for the young. Fear of street crime was mentioned frequently, and was, unfortunately, well-founded in experience. Finally, several people interviewed were concerned about home ownership and unethical landlords.

While the problems cited were similar, the mechanisms for coping differed between residents of Norton and Weston. Weston residents reported turning to Americans for help while Norton residents did not. One Weston household head reported that most of his relatives had left Philadelphia, but that he had decided to stay because of his job, and because of Americans who were helpful to him in solving problems.

In addition, the closure of the interviews themselves revealed differences between Weston and Norton Hmong. At each interview, I offered to repay the favor of the interview by providing help in any way desired by the interviewee. Household heads in Norton, while polite and cooperative, remained rather formal and invited no further interaction. In contrast, interviews conducted in Weston had rather different outcomes. In response to my offer, one man immediately enlisted help in dealing with a car swindle. A second man's son asked for my office number at Community College where he is a student, for help in English should the need arise. The desire for exchange of resources did not only go one way. A third man placed his four-day old baby in my arms, offered me beer, and invited me to the celebration of the birth. Two families prepared meals for me. One man had added my name to the phone list on the wall at the time I called to set up the interview. Most asked when I could return to visit again.

Indeed, Pao Youa and Chou Chang are not unique in their dispositions toward me. They are typical of their sub-communities, acting in ways consistent with the degree to which their networks are open to the integration of Americans, and the ways in which their networks permit the solving of problems.

The differences among Chou and Pao Youa discussed here have included differences in residence choice, religious preference, interest in tradition, as well as structure and content of networks. The clues that these differences provide about divisions in the community are further reflected in the choice of names for children.

While 71% of the children under 7 in Norton have been given Hmong names, only 21% of their age-mates in Weston have been so named. The striking difference might be explained by differing exposures to American names, by differing desires for integration into the host culture, or by differing pressures from kin networks.[8] In any case, it is clear that child naming practices are consistent with the data on the makeup of networks of Norton versus Weston Hmong.

3.3.3 Literacy and Social Relations

This section has focused on two communities, and the place of two individuals within those communities. Pao Joua and Chou Chang use literacy skills for very different ends with different consequences. Just as literacy plays a different role in the life of each, so each individual plays a distinct role in the life of the community.

The literacy activities of two men are characterized by striking differences. Pao Youa's literacy activities are directed <u>inward</u> to his family and clan, reinforcing his connection with his tradition and with his history. The documentation he engages in affirms old ties and keeps old connections vital to kin, to the past, and to Laos. Chou, on the other hand, uses literacy to reach <u>outward</u>, connecting with new kinds of resources, creating

new relationships in a social world of Americans that Chou takes risks to explore.

The conditions under which Pao Youa and Chou interact with print are vastly different. When Chou comes home, he and Sai open mail. They both read out loud as they slowly process the correspondence. A letter can mean the difference between continuing or losing their welfare benefits. One afternoon I watched first Sai, then Chou read aloud through a long computerized luggage advertisement before deciding, in the end, that it did not interest them. They did not have the mechanisms yet for quickly screening important documents from "junk" mail.

Pao Youa need not concern himself when screening mail. His son can perform a second screening, and Hang Chou, his affinal kin, can tackle the more difficult problems. Pao Youa is free from the responsibilities of solving bureaucratic problems or of coping with enigmatic English-language documents.

These two men differ in the degree to which they must solve problems themselves. Pao Youa's strong kin network permits a division of labor which enables him to delegate literacy tasks to others (While he retains prestigious responsibility for a wide range of problem-solving). Chou must perform most of his own literacy-related tasks himself or turn to an American with whom he has an institutional relationship. This is often a last resort since there is little way of reciprocating the favor to Americans who have little use for Chou's resources. The men also differ in the ends for which they use literacy. These uses are obviously constrained and affected by the kinds of problems which they must solve.

The data from the in-depth studies is corroborated by data collected in the larger community. While there are some individual deviations, in general, Norton and Weston are characterized by different clusters of features including different religious preferences, social networks, and literacy needs and practice. The relation among these is not incidental.

The most obvious relationship is that between religious conviction and literacy- where the explicit motivation for learning to read, and the prime literacy activity thereafter is reading the Bible. The relationship between literacy activity and the nature of social network is less obvious but equally compelling.

A person whose social network is comprised of kin is likely to have a rich pool of resources that will be at his/her disposal. When many kin are involved, the relationships are multiplex, assuring a variety of means of reciprocity. In the case of Norton Hmong, dense and multiplex networks permit a division of labor in which specialists can be relied upon for negotiation with institutions, or for solving other literacy-related problems. Services can be repaid with cooking at special occasions, with contributions toward bride price, or in any number of ways that kin support one another.

A person who has a network that is less dense, with relationships that are singular, has to work harder to get a particular problem solved. Problems cannot be casually brought up while fishing, but rather must be addressed in a telephone call specifically for that purpose. Such a person has less means at his/her disposal to reciprocate, and therefore must turn to institutional relationships to get things done. The costs can be considerable for depending on people with whom one does not have a trusting or long-term relationship. In situations where networks are less dense and multiplex, relationships may be less stable. It is not surprising that the troubled summer of 1981 resulted in the exodus and dispersion of most of Weston, while Norton remained intact.

As a result of the instability of helping groups, literacy becomes a commodity which is needed by each family that is faced with solving its own problems. Without specialists in advocacy positions, literacy is a critical tool for survival in a dangerous world of bureaucracy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the uses of literacy of Hmong in Philadelphia were examined in context of other modes of communication, while their kinship ties were looked at along with other kinds of helping relationships. Both of these were viewed as social resources which were drawn on to solve various problems in adapting to life in the United States. In the pages above, I compared the social networks of two people as well as the differences in how literacy is used in their lives. Pao Youa uses literacy to connect to the past and to Hmong tradition, while Chou uses literacy to make new relationships. These men were then placed in the context of the larger community. It is shown here that there are really two sub-communities of Hmong in Philadelphia in which the members engage in very different kinds of meaning-making activities involving different kinds of literacy events.

Differences in literacy use both reflect and create differences in social relationships. For Chou Chang and Pao Youa Lo, uses of literacy both reflected their aspirations while also creating new roles for them in their respective communities. Anthropologists who are interested in models of kinship and social interaction have much to gain by taking into account the communicative means by which social relationships are maintained or developed, and through which they are mobilized. As in the case for the two men described above, differences in literacy use can provide a lens through which to gain an understanding of important community patterns and social process.

When I first met Pao Youa in the classroom, I could only see him as a dismally failing student with no hope for making it. Chou Chang, on the other hand, plodded through, allocated the time and resources necessary to complete enigmatic grammar exercises, learned the rules of classroom behavior, and came out with his high school equivilency degree. A teacher who met these two men in the classroom would have missed much- she could not

have imagined the kinds of resources at the command of the older student, nor could she have imagined the difficulties of the star pupil, who would eventually leave Philadelphia in despair of his social isolation.

Anthropologists who study literacy and social process have much to offer educational policy and practice. By helping to make explicit what social as well as educational resources adults bring with them, anthropologists can help educators to build on resources that adults already have. By discovering the meanings and uses of literacy for members of diverse cultural communities, anthropologists can help educational planners take into account what adults want literacy to do for them.

By recognizing the resources that students bring to education, we make it possible for them to build on what they have, and to therefore have more successful and productive learning experiences. By encourging adults to develop resources for their own ends, we encourage the development of diverse cultural treasures that can enrich us all.

ENDNOTES

1. For more on the study, see Weinstein-Shr 1986.

2. I count widows and their families among their husband's clan, as do the Hmong themselves. However, the unpredictability of residence choice casts doubt on the completeness of transfer of woman's membership after her husband's death.

3. All names have been changed to protect privacy.

4. Some of the material on Chou Chang appears in "Investigating literacy: Approaches, tools and their consequences for inquiry". In Downing, B. and D. Olney, Eds., The Hmong in the West. Minneapolis: Southeast Asian Refugees Studies Project.

5. My relationship to these men and their families and my role in the community over the six years of the research include that of language teacher, language learner, community activist and ethnographic researcher. For more on these roles and the inherent conflicts between them, see Weinstein-Shr 1989.

6. A frequent complaint that Hmong have about adjusting to life in the United States concerns the laws that govern every aspect of living. Hmong are perplexed, for example, that zoning laws prohibit keeping/killing of animals such as pigs and chickens in their own homes, that there are all sorts of rules about where you can live and how many people can live in the house, and especially that the rules even dictate where you are allowed to bury your dead.

7. Bao Xiong is a remarkable entrepreneur who has developed a prosperous craft business, enabling her to live in a middle class suburb outside of Weston. For more on her success story, see Weinstein-Shr 1989b.

8. One Norton man reported wanting to give his child an American name, but having his wishes overridden by his father-in-law. This practice is in keeping with tradition in Laos, where household heads (who are often grandparents) ordinarily name children.

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Literacy and Social Process: A community in transition

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Resources: Kinship and literacy
Research questions, research design
Organization of chapter to follow

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4. Conclusion

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